

# The Meanings of Happiness in Mass Observation's Bolton

*by Ian Gazeley and Claire Langhamer*

On 28 April 1938 a small advertisement appeared on the front page of the Lancashire penny newspaper, the *Bolton Evening News*. 'What is Happiness?' it asked, explaining:

Once more 'Competitions' are wanting to find out what Bolton thinks, as it has done already about Beer and Pools. You are asked to write simply what you personally think is HAPPINESS for you and yours. Don't bother about style or grammar. Just write it down.<sup>1</sup>

The address for entries was 85 Davenport Street, Bolton. Prizes of two guineas, one guinea and half a guinea were promised. The judge was to be Bolton-born social scientist and broadcaster Professor John Hilton.<sup>2</sup> The advertisement reappeared over the next few days in slightly amended forms: 'Do you want a million pounds? A cottage in the country? Everyone wants happiness – but what is happiness?' and 'Are you happy? Do you want to be happy? What do you think happiness is?'<sup>3</sup> Each time entrants were encouraged to write regardless of literary skill. Potential entrants were assured that 'it's your ideas that we want'. An additional incentive was to be the publication of the winners' names in the evening newspaper, received by ninety-six per cent of Bolton homes.<sup>4</sup> A fortnight later the winners were announced.<sup>5</sup> Accompanying the results was a statement from the judge:

It has been a great pleasure to me to read these papers. In every one of them is some turn of phrase that takes me right back to the fireside of my childhood days. The plain good sense and the kindness in one and all of them tells me of Bolton folk. My one trouble has been that I have hated to put any one of them out of the running for a prize. But it had to be done. I could give reasons for my choice, but to set them out adequately would take a column of the 'Bolton Evening News', so I

will be content to say ‘There’s my pick for the prizes; but to all who are not on the list – my regrets and respects’.<sup>6</sup>

85 Davenport Street was in fact home to the British social investigative organization Mass Observation during its ‘Worktown’ survey.<sup>7</sup> The competition was one of many methods the investigators used to research everyday life in Bolton across the years 1937–1940. Letters of varying length outlining the nature of happiness were received from 226 individuals. A follow-up questionnaire was completed by most entrants, providing details of their occupation and age and a self-assessment of how often they were ‘really happy’.<sup>8</sup> This questionnaire also asked individuals to rank order ten factors making for happiness; to judge whether it was easier to be happy in Bolton or Blackpool; to assess the happiest time of the week and to consider the role played in happiness by luck. Although every entrant was sent a copy of the questionnaire each was led to believe they were actually on a shortlist: ‘In order to assist us in selecting the best from a number of good ones, we [sic] asking you to answer the following simple questions...The prizes are for sincerity, not for style.’<sup>9</sup> Mass Observation in fact did little with the responses. Here we examine this hitherto ignored material.

Mass Observation’s happiness survey was carried out at a critical point in British twentieth-century history: just prior to the Second World War and towards the end of a period of prolonged economic depression.<sup>10</sup> Fear of war was growing after Nazi Germany’s reoccupation of the demilitarized Rhineland in March 1936 and the ‘Anschluss’ with Austria in March 1938. The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War had brought Basque refugee children to Bolton by the middle of 1937.<sup>11</sup> In 1938, unemployment in Britain remained stubbornly high at around 2.1 million workers, though it had fallen substantially from its interwar peak of 3.4 million in 1932.<sup>12</sup> As we will see, responses to the Happiness competition reflected this economic and international context. They also reflect changing ways of understanding and narrating the modern self.

There is general scholarly agreement that selfhood changed markedly over the course of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>13</sup> A diverse range of psychological perspectives circulating in the popular culture of the interwar period offered ‘a tool for the self-fashioning of new identities in response to the opportunities, but also the anxieties, brought by modernity’.<sup>14</sup> Mass-produced fiction

and film provided new material from which the individual could derive inspiration;<sup>15</sup> the methods pioneered by Mass Observation provided new opportunities in the mid twentieth century for ordinary individuals to compose a sense of self.<sup>16</sup> Here we show how within the genre of the competition a self-selected group of Boltonians crafted stories that can be used to explore modern selfhood.<sup>17</sup> These constructions drew upon a wide range of everyday resources, beliefs and experiences and can be viewed as ‘meaning of life’ frameworks serving practical, as well as psychic, purposes.

The factors which determined individual happiness according to the competition entrants in Bolton in 1938 were remarkably stable across age group and gender. Economic security emerged as the dominant consideration, whilst personal pleasure was represented as playing little part in generating happiness. A detailed analysis of the happiness letters and questionnaires suggests that introspective and relational factors were also important determinants of well-being.<sup>18</sup> We will demonstrate that these introspective factors were framed by an individual’s personal moral framework and that relational factors were underpinned by gendered conceptions of domestic happiness.

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Mass Observation’s Worktown investigators were not the first to interrogate the nature of happiness in mid-century Britain. Sir Arthur Steel-Maitland MP delivered a public lecture at the London School of Economics on ‘Economics and Happiness’ in 1921;<sup>19</sup> Harold Dearden’s *The Science of Happiness* (1925) offered a comprehensive guide to personal well-being via ‘an intelligent study of psychology’;<sup>20</sup> while philosopher Bertrand Russell explored the concept in his 1930 book *The Conquest of Happiness*.<sup>21</sup> That same year the *Daily Chronicle* sponsored a National Health and Happiness Exhibition at Olympia in recognition that ‘Health and happiness are of the first importance to the individual and to the nation’.<sup>22</sup> While Huxley’s novel, *Brave New World*, pointed to the dystopic potential of a state where compulsory happiness and security reigned, ‘Britain’s Poet of Happiness’, Wilhelmina Stitch (in reality single mother Ruth Collie) offered ‘a fragrant minute, a daily psalm of joy’, every Monday in the *Daily Herald*.<sup>23</sup> By 1936 the Royal Medical Society was calling for a Ministry and a Department of Public Happiness: ‘A healthy nation tended to be happy, and a happy nation tended to be healthy’.<sup>24</sup>

Nor was Mass Observation's happiness competition a unique venture. In November 1937 the *Daily Mirror* announced that 'Happy people can win 10'6!', asking, 'Are you happy? If the answer is YES send a letter immediately to the "Daily Mirror" passing on the secret of your happiness'.<sup>25</sup> Those who felt they qualified were asked to write 200 words on their secret formula and to enclose 'if you have one' a picture of themselves smiling. The majority of letters published were from married women readers. The first letter in the series modelled a conception of happiness founded upon service and duty. Mrs J. Langley-Beattie explained that when she first married she 'was very selfish and insisted on going out to quite a lot of shows, nice suppers out and, of course, clothes played a large part'. However when her husband fell ill she was forced to nurse him and found something new, 'the happiness that comes from serving others'.<sup>26</sup> (As we shall see, the association between happiness and service was also voiced by some Bolton women; so too was a rejection of a link between personal pleasure and happiness.) Other *Mirror* readers proclaimed that their happiness rested on marital and family love, contentment, caring for others and good health. The gendered underpinning to happiness discourse is striking. There were nonetheless exceptions, whose existence suggests that representations of happiness were also framed by life-cycle stage. Miss Doris Hunt of Bristol stands out. 'For many years I paid but scanty attention to my dress, thinking that it was personality that counted with men, not pretty clothes', she confessed. In fact Doris did not find happiness until she abandoned this assumption and became a self-proclaimed 'Glamour Girl'. 'Yes pride in my personal appearance brought me the happiest time of my life', she proclaimed, 'and I would like others to know that the girl who gets the most thrilling parts to play in real life, as well as on the films, is the girl who looks most exciting'.<sup>27</sup> For Miss Hunt, self-fashioning was central to the pursuit of happiness; it also netted her a cash prize. While the desire to qualify for a financial reward may have encouraged a degree of conformity, Miss Hunt's success suggests that dominant happiness narratives – those framed around self-sacrifice and duty for example – were not universally embraced.

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Six months after the *Daily Mirror* competition, Mass Observation turned its attention to the study of happiness. The organization had been established early the previous

year by Charles Madge, Tom Harrisson and Humphrey Jennings. As is widely known, its stated aim was to generate a 'science of ourselves'. Mass Observation's work until the early 1950s is usually split into two broad categories. First, there was the collection of personal accounts from a panel of volunteer writers who contributed 'day surveys', diaries and responses to a monthly open-ended questionnaire called a 'directive'.<sup>28</sup> The second prominent component comprised social investigation conducted by a small team of researchers who employed a range of methods including participant observation, questionnaires, interviews and competitions. The study of particular locations, by Mass Observers embedded within communities, was a characteristic approach.<sup>29</sup> However, although this cleavage between social observation and volunteer writing provides a basic way to understand Mass Observation, its messy and sometimes contradictory research methods do, at times, confound the distinction. The method through which the happiness data was generated – the open competition – is one such instance.

In its first publication, Mass Observation emphasized the importance of conducting research beyond London: '[t]o ensure against a predominance at the centre of intellectuals living in academic isolation, the co-ordinators must spend much time in mass-environments, visiting industrial areas and working there'.<sup>30</sup> With this in mind, and informed by Tom Harrisson's prior experiences in the town, Bolton was chosen as Mass Observation's industrial base between the years 1937 and 1940. Harrisson identified Bolton – renamed Worktown – as an emblematic location from which to observe a working class regarded by those outside of it as 'almost a race apart'.<sup>31</sup>

Worktown equals Bolton, Lancashire. There has never been any pretence about that. But we have from the start considered it as *Worktown*, because what counts is not only its particular characteristics as a place, but all it shares in common with other principal working-class and industrial work-places throughout Britain.<sup>32</sup>

In fact the 'anthropology of ourselves' had begun as a study of 'Northtown', a pseudonym more regionally specific than the Worktown name adopted by the time of the 1939 Penguin Special *Britain*.<sup>33</sup>

Interwar Bolton was a medium-sized town of cotton, coal and engineering with a population of about 177,000 at the time of the 1931 census.<sup>34</sup> Metalwork, commerce, finance and personal service were also significant employers. Like most textile towns

of the North-West it had relatively high levels of female employment; there was also a significant level of unemployment. The 1931 census recorded 14,555 Boltonians as out of work: seventeen per cent of the occupied male and twelve per cent of the occupied female population.<sup>35</sup> By 1936 the figure had dropped only slightly to 13,855 people registered as unemployed.<sup>36</sup> 'In 1936–7 it is fair to say that the whole *atmosphere* breathed insecurity and dread of unemployment', Tom Harrisson later recalled.<sup>37</sup>

When J. B. Priestley had passed through Bolton on his way to Blackpool, in 1933, he asserted that, '[b]etween Bolton and Manchester the ugliness is so complete that it is almost exhilarating. It challenges you to live there'.<sup>38</sup> Bolton itself exhibited many of the characteristics of Priestley's second, or 'nineteenth-century', England.<sup>39</sup> Nonetheless by 1938 the *Newspaper Press Directory and Advertiser's Guide* maintained that 'Bolton can justly claim to be the leading Lancashire town'.<sup>40</sup> It was held to exhibit a 'progressive nature and outlook' and had recently spent heavily upon improvements to municipal buildings, including an extension to the town hall and the curved crescent of the Bolton Civic Centre.<sup>41</sup> As John Walton observes, the impact of Bolton's civic improvement scheme, led by the Conservative Party, was 'cosmetic and imposing' and largely failed to address the overcrowding and squalor of slum areas.<sup>42</sup> The town did, however, provide extensive leisure opportunities for its inhabitants and those of the surrounding area. There were six dance-halls, catering for between 500 and 1,000 dancers each, 300 public houses and a Free Style Wrestling stadium which had opened in a converted mill in 1933.<sup>43</sup> Film critic Leslie Halliwell recalled of his 1930s childhood there:

For a film fanatic, Bolton was almost like Mecca. At one time there lay within my easy reach no fewer than forty-seven cinemas of varying size, quality and character. None was more than five miles from Bolton's town hall, and twenty-eight were within the boundaries of the borough.<sup>44</sup>

For those in search of spiritual edification, Bolton also boasted an impressive range of opportunities. Mass Observation – which planned but never published a book on religious activity in the town – identified nearly separate 200 churches and chapels, catering to Anglican, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Unitarian, Baptist, Methodist and Congregationalist tastes.<sup>45</sup>

Under the direction of Tom Harrison, the Mass Observers immersed themselves in all aspects of Bolton life. 'The object of our studies in Worktown was to take the whole structure of the place and analyse it out.'<sup>46</sup> Participant-observation research was conducted on religious sects, political parties, businesses, clubs, cotton mills, consumption and leisure practices. The research team included working-class men such as Walter Hood and Joe Willcock and locals such as Eric Bennet and Harry Gordon, as well as women and men drawn from the university-educated southern middle class.<sup>47</sup> Nonetheless, the Worktown project has often been characterized as observation of the masses, rather than the self-observation evident in Mass Observation's national diary and directive material. James Hinton, for example, states that in Worktown 'the stress was on the observation of behaviour, anywhere from the funeral parlour to the dance floor, rather than on soliciting the views of those being observed'.<sup>48</sup> This reading of the Worktown project has laid it open to criticism. For Peter Gurney, Mass Observers in Worktown 'failed to take working-class selfhood seriously...alternative identities and subjectivities were either ignored or simply observed, with varying degrees of empathy'.<sup>49</sup> Class and gender assumptions inflected their approach and 'deeply ingrained elitism and class snobbery' informed the project.<sup>50</sup>

A closer look at the methods employed by Mass Observation in Bolton suggests that there at least these criticisms are somewhat inaccurate. Running alongside observation of the masses through 'overheard' and 'indirect' conversation, and the collection of ephemera and secretive photography, there were opportunities for self-reflective expression through essays, interviews and participation in competitions run through the local press. The latter, in particular, generated experiential material not dissimilar from the material simultaneously being submitted by a national panel of Mass Observation volunteer writers under Charles Madge's direction at Blackheath.<sup>51</sup> Competition entries provide a way of going beyond the reports on Boltonians written by Mass Observers to access the self-authored perspectives of Bolton people themselves. Mass Observation believed that competitions were a particularly effective device for soliciting the thoughts and feelings of ordinary people. In a draft article entitled 'Mass-Observation in Bolton: a social experiment', the project's aims and objectives were summarized for a general audience:

One way you can help is by entering for the competitions which Mass-Observation will announce from time to time in the advertising columns of the *Bolton Evening News*. What the Mass Observers want is information, not a polished literary piece. So don't have any hesitation in sending your entry because it is just a simple statement of fact. That – and nothing else – is what is required and therefore most likely to win a prize.<sup>52</sup>

As we will show later, these competition entries are not unproblematic as a source. However they do offer access to contemporaneous accounts of everyday lives and attitudes which would not otherwise be available.

The happiness competition was one of a series conducted prior to the war, usually in partnership with sponsors. Local newspapers were frequently used to publicize the competitions and to announce results. Guest judges tended to be people of local standing. Most topics concerned leisure, reflecting the organization's preoccupation with leisure practices across the Worktown project. For example, a prize of £5 was offered for the best account of 'How I spent one day of my September holidays'. Judged by James Whittaker, BBC journalist and author, it generated 564 responses. Further competitions followed on drinking beer, smoking and the football pools.<sup>53</sup> A focus on cinema-going in March 1938 generated 560 entries all vying for two prizes of £1 each and six double complimentary tickets.<sup>54</sup> In September 1938, the proprietors of the Bolton all-in wrestling stadium acted as judges for a competition which asked 'What do you like about all-in wrestling?' and advised: 'make it short and snappy or long and argumentative. Anything you like. The Prizes will go to those whose replies are judged to be the most straightforward and sincere.'<sup>55</sup> Indeed, this is the dominant message from the instructions given to entrants to all of the competitions run by Mass Observation in Bolton.

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The 'what is happiness' letters were written to widely differing length and format and were not necessarily 'straightforward'. Entrants adopted a variety of forms to express their views of happiness. These included verse, quotation, philosophical intervention, denunciation and complex life history. Proverbs, truisms and other forms of everyday episteme were repeatedly deployed, demonstrating, in part, the resilience of oral



culture.<sup>56</sup> This diversity suggests that there was no widely shared assumption about what a winning entry would look like. Was happiness ‘a perfume you cannot pour on others without getting some drops on yourself’;<sup>57</sup> was it ‘the experience of sharing life unselfishly’;<sup>58</sup> or was it simply ‘contentment’?<sup>59</sup> We have tried to understand the responses by considering them in relation to seven categories adapted from those used by the mid-century social psychologist, Hadley Cantril, in his postwar global study, *The Pattern of Human Concerns*.<sup>60</sup> Cantril’s work had been an influence on Mass Observation at its inception. In 1937 Madge and Harrisson referred to his 1934 article, ‘The Social Psychology of Everyday Life’, as offering important perspectives for a ‘ground plan for research’.<sup>61</sup> In *The Pattern of Human Concerns* Cantril aimed to discover people’s aspirations across fourteen countries, ‘to get an overall picture of the reality worlds in which people lived, a picture expressed by individuals *in their own terms*’.<sup>62</sup> We have analysed the letters and coded them using a modified Cantril scale.<sup>63</sup> The categories we use are *Self* (personal values, development and character); *Material* (personal economic situation, job or work); *Health*; *Relational* (family and friends); *Values* (moral, social, political); *World* (international situation); and *Natural World*. The factors do, of course, overlap and are not mutually exclusive, but understanding the letters in relation to them facilitates empirical investigation of the relationship between questionnaire responses and the letters and analysis of the data.

In trying to establish a hierarchy of the factors cited in the respondents’ letters, we base our analysis on a simple frequency of the categorical response. The category most frequently cited was *Self*. About three-quarters of all respondents mention aspects of this in their letters. That was followed by reference to elements of the *Relational* and *Values* categories: just under half of all respondents mentioned these in their letters. *Material* factors were the next most mentioned, but this category also had the highest number of explicit rebuttals. Just over one-third of all respondents cited *Material* factors as significant, but about one quarter explicitly ruled them out.<sup>64</sup> *Health* followed, then the *Natural World* and finally *World Events*, mentioned by less than one in twenty-five of the sample. This is a surprising result given the importance of security in the questionnaire responses which we discuss below. An advantage of using the modified Cantril scale to analyse the letters is that it allows us to interrogate the meaning of security for these individuals and specifically to consider whether the international context was a factor.

Given that *Self* is the category cited most often it is important to explore what Boltonians meant by the comments that we have categorized in this way. Mental harmony, a peaceful and contented mind and a clear conscience, often underpinned by religious faith or other moral frameworks, were typical ways of elaborating this. A forty-year-old single woman, a housekeeper, who described herself as 'always happy' and ranked 'more religion' most highly in her questionnaire and 'more pleasure' least, explained:

The idea with the thoughtless crowd is that happiness is to be found in material possessions in wealth and all that wealth can buy. True and lasting happiness is a mental and spiritual state found only from within ourselves. When we are right in the sight of God. There can be no happiness without service.<sup>65</sup>

Here we see a respondent drawing a line of cultural distinction between herself and others.

Mental harmony was frequently linked with other factors, the most significant of which were social or moral values and relationships with others. A particular theme of the letters was the relation between personal contentment and kindness to others. This relationship was so frequently articulated that, as we have seen, John Hilton made mention of it when announcing the winners. An 'always happy' widower aged sixty-five put it thus: 'happiness is created within, having a clear conscience of having done humanity some good turn, both in thought and deed'.<sup>66</sup> The association was not generationally specific. A female confectioner aged twenty-one asserted that '[h]appiness is the state of one's mind when you help others. The direct result of loving one's neighbours as thyself'. She believed 'more religion' to be essential for the attainment of true happiness.<sup>67</sup> For others, domestic relationships were the key to happiness. A mother of six, forty-three years old, wrote that '[h]appiness spells "contentment of mind" which to me is interpreted as follows: marriage, a give and take husband and wife, and healthy children'.<sup>68</sup> This woman proceeded to outline the happiness she derived from the hard work, love and gratitude of her children; and from her weekly churchgoing and well-developed housekeeping skills. Her conclusion, however, demonstrates the complex ways in which competition entries were constructed and the layers of autobiographical disclosure within them. She writes,

I could fill page upon page describing my happiness and I shall consider it 'complete happiness' when I have no further need for the PAC [Public Assistance Committee] to augment my weekly income and when my husband against whom I hold a court order for persistent cruelty comes home to tell me he is 'sorry' and proves it, yes a contented mind spells happiness.

For most respondents, then, happiness was rooted in home and in relationships with other people. A single twenty-four-year-old without any living family nonetheless presented home and social relations as key components in her understanding of happiness:

In the years I have been 'on my own', I have been gradually making new friends, real friends whom I can depend upon at all times and who in their turn know that I am here to share any difficulties or joys which they may bring to me. In short we're pals. Further I have a home of my own, a tiny one it is true, but someday I hope to have it properly furnished, at any rate its something to work for.<sup>69</sup>

Discussions of domestic happiness were, as in the *Daily Mirror* letters, infused with ideas about gender. A housewife of forty-three who classed herself as 'always happy' and put 'more equality' and 'more religion' at the top of her questionnaire rankings outlined her own view:

Happiness in your home is to be always agreeable with your husband, never argue one with another, always a smile and a kind word for him on his return from daily toil, always to have his meals punctual for him, a nice fire, his slippers ready for him to put on (if any) to look well after him in sickness as you do in health, keep to what you promise at the altar and then you will both be happy.<sup>70</sup>

This woman's happiness depended upon her performance of the wifely role, demonstrating that socially inculcated expectations framed her conception of domestic happiness. The 'more equality' she desired was not necessarily gender equality within the home. For many women personal happiness was in fact inextricably linked to the happiness of other family members. The Happiness letters

provide sideways, contemporaneous, access to the allocation of emotional work within the home. Happiness was not merely subjective; it was produced out of social relations.

Unhappiness generated by destabilized gender roles was, in one instance, construed as potentially life-threatening. ‘Happiness, gee I am bubbling over with joy as I read your advertisement, because I believe that love with a capital L is the great happiness’, wrote a forty-five-year-old spinning-mill worker, father of one:

sixteen-weeks ago my wife decided to work at an (sic) hotel to help me with my house payments but I did not like the idea, but I let her go, of course I saw very little of her through her having long hours to work. Inwardly I began to brood and after 12 weeks I collapsed and bled from the mouth, of course my wife had to give up her work and send for the doctor...when asked what was the cause he could not tell me, but I have the opinion that it was a bleeding heart, it might sound funny but now I am ready for my work once again with my old happiness returned to me, that is what I call happiness, true love.<sup>71</sup>

Of course we do not know his wife’s emotional response to this situation. What the story does disclose is that claims to happiness and unhappiness provided a powerful negotiating tool in everyday family life. This man’s response also suggests a belief that actively demonstrating happiness was an essential prerequisite of success in the competition.

Whilst health, the natural world and world events were generally uncontroversial, if minor, factors in definitions of happiness, the role played by economics was the most contested. For some, money and material goods were essential for happiness. In rare cases this was because they facilitated access to commercial leisure. A male stripper and grinder in a cotton mill who was ‘mostly happy after working hours’ was clear that,

Happiness today depends more than ever it did upon the amount of income because of the increased leisure time and more and more entertainments and attractions which I can only attend by having a reasonable wage which in turn gives me more spending money or pocket money, and whether the pleasures are good for me or

not, modern young men and women will have them, and if I could not afford them, well, I should not feel very happy about it.<sup>72</sup>

However, very few Boltonians claimed a correlation between great riches and happiness. Rather, respondents expressed a wish for just enough money to meet perceived everyday and leisure-time needs and perhaps some savings to provide for that much coveted status, security. ‘Save a bit, spend a bit, give a bit’ was a much repeated piece of practical and moral wisdom.<sup>73</sup> A single woman of fifty-two wrote that ‘to have a wee nest egg, in the bank for a rainy day, or old age; to be able to pay one’s way and to have a shilling to spare is my idea of happiness’.<sup>74</sup> For the majority of respondents, however, material factors were not part of the happiness story; about a quarter of respondents identified money as definitely not a factor making for happiness and indeed a potential cause of *unhappiness*. Reference to the – slightly adapted – English proverb, ‘when poverty enters your door happiness flies out the window’, was balanced by the assertion that ‘happiness is the greatest thing in life that money can’t buy’.<sup>75</sup>

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The questionnaire which was sent to entrants upon receipt of their letters asked a series of questions which are outlined in the appendix. Respondents provided their age and occupation but not their income. The process by which we assessed income levels using contemporaneous documents is described elsewhere.<sup>76</sup> We note here, however, that incomes across the sample do not vary much because professional and unskilled occupations are under-recorded. Respondents were asked ‘how often are you really happy?’ We categorized their responses in five groups: ‘rarely or never happy’ (1); ‘not often or infrequently happy’ (2); ‘sometimes happy’ (3); ‘often or frequently happy’ (4); and ‘always or nearly always happy’ (5).<sup>77</sup>

Women represented themselves as being slightly happier on average than men, but the difference is not significant using this categorization. The frequency distributions of happiness for men and women are similar, though women have a greater proportion of ‘frequently happy’ responses. This of course does not necessarily mean that women were actually happier than men; simply that they were more likely to claim to be so. A stoical or ‘mustn’t grumble’ approach to life was more apparent in the responses of

women than of men. For example, an ‘often happy’ widow of forty-four who kept house for her son, brother and invalid mother, admitted that:

Never whilst life lasts will I experience complete happiness as often there is a pensive mood – the reason a dearly loved husband and brother sleeping in Flanders. But throwing myself wholeheartedly into my duties having kindness as my creed and living in garden surroundings, my family appreciating my efforts for their welfare I find all the happiness I could ever attain in life.<sup>78</sup>

A mother of five claimed to be ‘nearly always’ happy ‘as I try to look on the bright side and make the best of whatever comes’,<sup>79</sup> while a forty-four-year-old housewife advised, ‘[t]ry to make best of life, you need to make the best of it even when there are ups and downs’.<sup>80</sup>

Most respondents provided further insight into their self-assessment by annotating their questionnaire response. These annotations tend to confirm the priorities outlined more discursively by respondents in their letters. The importance of both introspective and relational factors is affirmed. An unemployed thirty-five-year-old found himself most happy ‘when I am making my contribution to the happiness of others – wife, child, friends or the larger circle I touch in religious and communal life’.<sup>81</sup> ‘At all times I try to keep that serenity of mind which brings contentment and happiness’, wrote a thirty-five-year-old woman mill worker, ‘I have been sad many times, but not unhappy’.<sup>82</sup> Like the letters, these brief annotations offer deeply personal, and sometimes eclectic, reflections on the nature of personal happiness. Take, for example, the charwoman who suggested she was happiest ‘when going to my job because my employers are friendly and do not make me feel like a servant and strangely when going to the wash-house. I like the action and change of pace’.<sup>83</sup> A tannery worker of twenty-six claimed to be happy very often, ‘but only on those occasions when I am neither living in the past nor the future, but in the immediate present e.g. in conversation with congenial companions; when absorbed in the rhythm of a dance; when taking part in an impromptu “sing song”; when engaged in manual work demanding undivided attention’.<sup>84</sup> Others pondered the difficulties inherent in quantifying happiness. ‘Can happiness be measured by time? Joy and sorrow are so closely allied together that it is sometimes hard to distinguish which of the two emotions you really feel. One creates the other. To know joy you must have had

sorrow', wrote a packer at a cotton mill.<sup>85</sup> 'I cannot answer this truthfully, as it depends on circumstances', observed an eighteen-year-old woman.<sup>86</sup>

Taken as a whole the comments situate happiness within a reflexive, ethical framework rooted in social relations. Those who defined themselves as 'rarely happy' seem also to have shared the 'mustn't grumble' ethos of happier people. A 'not really happy' twenty-two-year-old man admitted: 'I should be under an illusion were I to say that I'm really happy on account of being unemployed. But still that hasn't prevented me from enjoying the benefits of everyday things and the wonders of the universe'.<sup>87</sup> Nonetheless, it is in these questionnaire responses that we see the most powerful discursive evidence of the factor considered by most Boltonians to be a vital prerequisite for happiness: security. A housewife declared herself not very often happy: 'If means were a little better I would be more often happier. I mean employment for my husband – that is security'.<sup>88</sup> A 'not very' happy warehouseman provided rare evidence of insecurity resulting from the unfolding international situation. 'The fear of illness – early death and nothing after on earth. Relatives or friends being in trouble. Thinking of my wife and child with gas masks on. These vivid thoughts rob me of constant happiness. Sometimes I find forgetfulness in reading a good book.'<sup>89</sup>

Having established the frequency with which respondents were happy, the Mass Observation questionnaire asked them to rank ten factors in order of importance for the creation of 'true happiness'. The rank ordering of factors is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Average rank order of factors making for happiness from questionnaire responses.**

Factor "More....."	All	All Men	All Women	Single Women	Married & Widowed Women	Young People aged 25 years & under
Security	1	1	1	1	1	1
Knowledge	2	2	2	2	2	3
Religion	3	5	3	3	3	4
Humour	4	4	4	4	4	2
Equality	5	3	5	5	5	5
Beauty	6	6	6	6	6	6
Action	7	7	7	7	7	7

<b>Pleasure</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Leadership</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Politics</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>n</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>48</b>

*Note: 186 is the number of those who ranked all factors in order. For the entire sample, individual factors were ranked by between 193 and 200 respondents, but only 186 of them ranked all ten factors. The rank ordering is based upon the overall mean for each factor.*

This table shows the rank ordering of these factors to be very stable across the sample. More security, knowledge and religion would make for greater happiness according to these Boltonians. Only among the young is there a slight difference in the factors ranked higher, with humour being more highly ranked than it is among older people. Given the particular circumstances of the late 1930s, with nearly thirteen per cent of insured workers registered as being without work, it is perhaps not surprising that ‘more security’ would be cited as the most important factor. Nearly one in three people who responded to the questionnaire ranked ‘more security’ first. The unstable international context of 1938 might suggest that concerns about world events informed this desire for more security, but the letters suggest otherwise.

It is clear that for a few, the prospect of war did weigh heavily. A twenty-seven-year-old carpet weaver explained his ideal of happiness in such an all-encompassing manner that it is worth quoting at length:

What is my ideal of happiness? Well I should say security. Security in work which in return gives me a living wage and so security in living. Security in the home, with a dependable life partner who would work along with me to secure happiness in the home. Security for world peace to give me opportunity to think of life, at home, of green fields, and laughing children, instead of the hovering spectre of war with its gas masks and shells, and attendant shambles.<sup>90</sup>



For this man economic, domestic and world security were interlocking spheres. On the whole, however, competition entrants rarely mentioned the world situation in their letters. Only one in twenty-five cited world peace or concerns about war as having a bearing on personal happiness. For the vast majority of respondents, security was conceptualized in economic terms, regardless of age or gender. A single female cutter in a bleach works, aged thirty, put it particularly clearly:

My idea of happiness is summed up in the one word (security). It would give me the greatest happiness in the world to feel secure in the knowledge that my family and myself may never be dependent on others for our livelihood. By this I do not mean to live in extravagance, but just enough to live in comfort. How nice it must be when you see a book in a shop window by your favourite author and you are able to go in and buy it without first considering the price.<sup>91</sup>

In the Bolton of 1938, economic security was a precondition for personal happiness. A happy world was a secure world where individuals could control their everyday environment and provide for basic familial needs. These people did not aspire to great wealth, but they did want to control, in whatever way they could, the uncertain economic circumstances in which they found themselves.

The factors held to be least important to the respondents' well-being were politics, leadership and pleasure. One in four people ranked 'more politics' last. Even a fifty-year-old trade-union official, who gave Bolton Town Hall as his address, placed politics ninth; leadership was his last ranked factor.<sup>92</sup> He did, nonetheless, buck a different trend by placing 'more pleasure' first. The only other person to prioritize 'more pleasure' was a twenty-seven-year-old mother who was happiest when out with her husband: 'It reminds me of when we were courting'.<sup>93</sup> Most people represented themselves as being not particularly hedonistic. 'More pleasure' was ranked eighth out of ten across the sample. In the letters, respondents were more likely to reject personal leisure as a factor making for happiness than to claim that it would enhance happiness. A distinction was sometimes drawn between the apparently authentic pleasures of the natural world and the manufactured delights of commercial leisure and popular culture. This is particularly evident in responses to the happiest place question which will be examined shortly. Introspective pleasures such as reading were perceived to be more intrinsic to happiness than either cinemas or public houses. The

thirty-eight-year-old warehouseman cited above, whose fear of war robbed him of happiness, nonetheless found some contentment in a quiet evening's reading:

Give me a book that has taken some serious author all his or her life to compile. Couch near a good fire and cigarettes within reach. The only knock on the door I will answer is my pal's whose knowledge of books exceeds mine. Then you can have your pubs, matinees, wireless and other excitements. I envy no-one. I'm happy.<sup>94</sup>

The only difference between men and women lay in the importance attached to religion and equality (Table 1, column 2 compared with column 3), with men ranking equality above religion. The precise meaning of this category for Mass Observation is not clear but where respondents who prioritized 'more equality' discussed this in their letters, they wrote about 'justice for the working man', 'freedom, liberty and justice to all mankind' and 'true practical brotherhood'.<sup>95</sup> Gender equality was not explicitly addressed in these texts. One in three women ranked 'more religion' first, whereas only one in five men did so. Religion was more likely to frame an ethical framework of kindness to others among women, than it was among men, whose good deeds were less likely to extend beyond the family. For a young shorthand typist, happiness arose from 'close communion with God and from a great and understanding sympathy of human nature, which brings to the happy possessor of such a state a long and abiding peace, which is capable of rising above the worries of life not by shirking burdens but by conquering through faith'.<sup>96</sup> A housewife of fifty-eight found happiness in 'doing good deeds to our fellow men and living a true Christian life to the best of one's ability'.<sup>97</sup> These findings support Callum Brown's claims both about the strength of working-class religiosity in interwar Britain and the key status of women as churchgoers.<sup>98</sup> Roughly the same proportion of men and women – about one in ten – ranked 'more equality' first, but overall in men's ordering of their preferences, more importance was attached to equality. A nineteen-year-old solicitor's clerk quoted J. B. Priestley on justice for the working man.<sup>99</sup> There was no difference between single and married and widowed women in the average rank order.<sup>100</sup>

Mass Observation's Bolton study was, of course, conducted in parallel with the study of 'holiday town', Blackpool. It should not then surprise us that Mass Observation asked these happiness respondents 'Which is the easier place to be happy

in: Blackpool or Bolton?’ The chart below shows that the largest group of respondents thought Bolton the happier place.

[insert Chart 1 (Fig. 2?): Happier Place: Blackpool or Bolton?]

In its 1943 study of Bolton pub life, *The Pub and the People*, Mass Observation suggested ‘[l]ocal patriotism is strong; though the town... is one of an endless chain across the north, it in no sense identifies itself with other adjacent towns’.<sup>101</sup> Local pride is evident in the responses here. ‘Bolton, for it is a grand town for all its smoke and busy streets’, wrote a cotton worker.<sup>102</sup> But the preference for Bolton also reflects the extent to which happiness was located in the physical space of home. ‘I prefer Bolton. It is home’, was a not untypical response.<sup>103</sup> While Blackpool suited some, its attractions were seen to be limited. One woman stated, not unreasonably, that although she preferred Blackpool for her holidays, ‘too much holiday making would get on her nerves’.<sup>104</sup> A ‘seldom happy’ plumber definitely preferred Bolton, ‘where I spend fifty-one weeks of the year. Blackpool to me only means self-indulgence according to my purse’.<sup>105</sup> A twenty-eight-year-old dressmaker described people in Blackpool ‘hectically pursuing happiness through the stimulation of pleasure’, as ‘all very pathetic. Whereas, to observe people quietly finding happiness through the “daily round – the common task” is (to say the least) heartening’.<sup>106</sup> A skilled labourer in a tannery believed that ‘in Bolton happiness has to be earned. In Blackpool, “happiness” in the dubious form of gaiety and pleasure is on tap on every street corner; this results in a surfeit, which quickly defeats its own object’.<sup>107</sup> One respondent confounded the choice presented by asserting that she was in fact happier in Southport.<sup>108</sup>

In addition to asking which was the happier place, Mass Observation also wanted to know the happier time of the week. The results are indicated in Chart 2. When asked whether it was easier to be happier at weekends or mid-week the majority of respondents suggested that it was in fact all the same to them. Those who did find greater happiness at the weekend cited as key attractions the release from employment, time spent with loved ones and, more rarely, the pursuit of leisure activities. The fact that the majority of people did not specify a happier time of the week is not a surprise given the dominance of an introspective, home-based model of

happiness. ‘It is all the same to me providing my home is happy’, observed a housewife.<sup>109</sup>

#### Insert Chart 2. Happier time of the week?

The final question posed concerned the role of luck in happiness. Mass Observation was consistently intrigued by superstition, believing it to be ‘infinitely adaptable’.<sup>110</sup> In its study of the Football Pools – a topic which John Hilton had also previously researched – it found that ‘Luck with a capital L constantly recurs in statements by Poolites [sic]’.<sup>111</sup> A little over two fifths of the Bolton sample believed that it also played a part in happiness. An unemployed seventeen-year-old man, who was nonetheless often happy, believed it to be of key importance, ‘being lucky enough to have good health and to win competitions such as this’.<sup>112</sup> He was amongst the minority who preferred Blackpool to Bolton. A housewife who claimed that ‘if you get the right man you’re jolly lucky’, pointed to the importance of luck in relational matters. She was part of the smaller group of respondents who were definitely happier at the weekend, ‘[y]ou generally get a bit more pleasure and rest at weekends’, she observed, adding that she was ‘happy when relations keep away’.<sup>113</sup> In contrast, another married woman maintained that, ‘Luck is chance. Happiness is created by oneself and to inspire others’. She found Bolton the happier place and was happy ‘as long as I am not idle’.<sup>114</sup> For a sizable minority of Boltonians, therefore, luck – good or bad – continued to exercise an influence on their everyday affairs and provided an explanatory framework for emotional, as well as material, circumstance.

\* \* \*

Mass Observation's research practices met with criticism at the time and they have continued to do so since.<sup>115</sup> Particular attention has been paid to the extent to which its national volunteer panel of diarists and directive writers can be considered 'representative'.<sup>116</sup> In the present case, an additional question as to representativeness concerns the method by which views on happiness were ascertained.

How representative of ordinary Boltonians are the 226 respondents to the *Bolton Evening News* happiness competition? Most obviously, there were more female than there were male respondents (fifty-eight per cent against forty, with two per cent unknown). This imbalance is not quite as significant as it might seem: in 1939 fifty-four per cent of the population of Bolton was female.<sup>117</sup> We have analysed representativeness in a number of other ways. The most straightforward is to compare the occupation recorded by the respondent on the happiness questionnaire with occupations in Bolton enumerated at the time of the 1931 Population Census. Table 2 reports extracted data from the 1931 Census using a standard classification of thirty-two industry groups, for both men and women. The figures reported are the percentage in each industrial group. Happiness respondents were significantly represented in only twelve industrial groups, with less than two per cent in the other twenty. This slightly understates industrial heterogeneity in Bolton, as the 1931 census records just under eight per cent working in these twenty industrial groups. Nevertheless, in terms of a straightforward industrial classification based upon self-described occupation, the overall correspondence is quite striking. As already noted, 1930s Bolton was first and foremost a town of textiles. Between one in five and one in four workers worked in this industry at the time of the 1931 census – exactly the same proportion as among the happiness respondents. At the time of the census, the next most numerically important occupations were in food, drink and tobacco (one in ten workers), commerce and finance (around one in fifteen), personal services (about one in twenty) and transport and communication (around one in thirty). These industrial groups are well represented among the happiness respondents, though the proportions are not identical between population and sample. (If they were it would indeed be remarkable given the self-selecting nature and relatively small number of happiness respondents.) Nevertheless, comparison of the occupation proportions derived from the census and from the competition, shows that the competition

respondents' occupations are generally fairly representative of the underlying population of Bolton in 1931

**Table 2: Industrial Group (per cent)**

	1931 census	1938 Happiness sample
Clerks & Draughtsmen	3.1	6.2
Commerce & Finance	6.9	4.8
Food, Drink & Tobacco	10.0	3.1
Mining & Quarrying	1.6	1.3
Personal Services	4.7	1.3
Professional	1.8	2.6
Skins & Leather	0.5	1.3
Textile Goods & Clothing	1.7	1.3
Textiles	22.4	22.5
Transport & Communication	3.5	2.2
Warehousemen	2.4	1.3
Retired or not gainfully occupied	33.5	28.2
Other	7.9	1.7

**Source: Column 1 calculated from Census of England and Wales, Occupations, Table 16, 'Occupation of Males and Females showing also total operatives and the total out of work', as reported by *Vision of Britain*.<sup>118</sup>**

Using the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure primary, secondary, tertiary (PST) classification scheme,<sup>119</sup> the correspondence between the census and the happiness sample is even more striking, as Table 3 shows. This comparison operates at a higher level of generality, with occupations classified into one of three broad groups: primary (agriculture and mining); secondary (all industrial occupations) and tertiary (distribution, commerce and personal services etc). At the time of the census, less than one per cent of people worked in the primary

sector in Bolton, compared with about two per cent amongst happiness respondents. In addition, the competition entrants included a few more individuals outside of the labour force, or who were unemployed or retired, than there had been at the time of the 1931 census. We find, however, that precisely the same proportion of women were economically active among the competition entrants and at the time of the 1931 census.<sup>120</sup> Correspondingly, those working in the secondary sector are slightly under-represented among the happiness respondents, while the proportions working in the tertiary sector are almost identical. In terms of this broad comparison of occupational identity, we conclude, therefore, that there is no significant sample bias.

Table 3: Bolton PST classification

PST	1931 Census	1938 Happiness Sample
Primary	<0.01	0.02
Secondary	0.40	0.34
Tertiary	0.20	0.19
Unclassified or unoccupied	0.40	0.45
	1.00	1.00

Source: column 1 calculated from Census of England and Wales, Occupations, Table 16, Occupation of Males and Females showing also total operatives and the total out of work, as reported by *Vision of Britain*.<sup>121</sup>

Finally, how representative are the happiness competition entrants in terms of social class? This comparison is trickier because it involves classifying the descriptions of occupation recorded by respondents. Sometimes the entrants provided descriptions of their work which were very detailed, and other times these were terse, with little indication of the skill involved (for example, 'textile worker'). Even with detailed descriptions of occupation, classifying the skill involved requires subjective assessment.<sup>122</sup> We have followed the five-point classification scheme developed by Armstrong (unskilled, partly skilled, skilled, intermediate and professional, corresponding to social classes 5 through to 1).<sup>123</sup> This scheme of classification is not

available for the 1931 census, so we make comparison with data extracted from the 1951 population census for Bolton instead, which is only available for males over fifteen. This introduces a further uncertainty: as we are making comparison across the Second World War period that might not be valid. With these caveats in mind, it can be seen from Table 4 that the male happiness respondents included a greater proportion of individuals employed in what Armstrong refers to as ‘intermediate’ social class (clerical workers, employers, commercial and financial occupations etc.) and correspondingly fewer skilled manual workers (engine drivers, engineering fitters, carpenters, weavers, spinners, miners etc.). The male happiness respondents were more likely to be ‘partly skilled’ (for example, a machine minder or skilled workers’ helper) than the underlying population with correspondingly fewer unskilled workers (mainly unskilled industrial labourers, porters, etc.). Given all of the problems of classification and ambiguities of description, it is nevertheless likely that there are real differences between the classification of census occupations in 1951 and the classification based upon the application of Armstrong’s schema to the descriptions of occupation given by happiness competition entrants. We conclude that male respondents to the competition were less likely to be unskilled and more likely to be in an ‘intermediate’ level social class than were males enumerated at the time of the 1951 census.

Table 4: Bolton Social Class Classification (males aged 15 and over)

Social Class	1951 Census	1938 Happiness sample
1	0.02	0.00
2	0.12	0.33
3	0.57	0.33
4	0.14	0.29
5	0.15	0.05
Total	1.00	1.00

Source: column 1 1951 Census of England and Wales, County Report, Table 27, ‘Social Class distribution of Occupied and Retired Males aged 15 or over’, as reported by *Vision of Britain*.<sup>124</sup>

Even if the contributors to this survey are in many ways representative of their locality it might, nonetheless, be suggested that the mechanism through which their



texts were generated exercised a significant influence over their content. Like the *Daily Mirror* letters, the Mass Observation happiness letters were written with the aim of securing monetary reward and this motivation may have exaggerated the desire to give the ‘right’ (winning) answer.<sup>125</sup> Some entrants made explicit reference to the possibility of winning the prize. A married electrical engineer probably thought that the offer to donate his winnings to the local mission might stand his entry in good stead.<sup>126</sup> A twenty-four-year old cotton mixer stated that he was happy ‘[w]hen I am successful in my ventures, to win in competitions, to be elected in a post in my trade union and pay day, Friday’.<sup>127</sup> Mass Observation was clearly attuned to the potential for ‘gaming’ that a competition for cash prizes might have encouraged: written across the bottom of one detailed letter is the word ‘bogus?’.<sup>128</sup>

Reflections on personal happiness are never produced within a value-free context. As Ahmed has argued, ‘If happiness is already understood to be what you want to have, then to be asked how happy you are is not to be asked a neutral question’.<sup>129</sup> A suspicion that only an avowedly happy person would stand a chance of winning the competition may have informed some people’s writing, and the letters are undoubtedly reflective of a dominant happiness discourse. This awareness of purpose, however, only makes explicit what is implicit in the autobiographical material Mass Observation generated through its other methods such as the monthly diary submissions and the questionnaire or ‘directive’ responses: a sense of exchange between writer and recipient and an authorial desire to self-fashion.<sup>130</sup> Margaretta Jolly has argued that letters from working-class people offer a space for ‘inventiveness and autobiography of a sometimes unexpected kind’.<sup>131</sup> The particular context in which the happiness letters emerged did frame responses but did not dictate them. Moreover, in contrast to the *Daily Mirror* contest, which only self-proclaimed happy people were encouraged to enter, it was not entirely clear on what grounds John Hilton would select the winners. Certainly not writing style – ‘the prizes are for sincerity, not for style’ – and probably not quality of experience either. John Hilton’s own comment as to the ‘plain good sense and kindness of Bolton folk’ suggests a moral agenda, but it was of course made in announcing the competition winners. The key message communicated to competition entrants was that entries should be authentic. It was up to individuals to decide how to best perform authenticity through the adoption, adaptation or rejection of dominant happiness codes in conjunction with their own everyday experience and subjectivities.

\* \* \*

Happiness is one of the most elusive things in life. It cannot be bought, for money often brings the reverse of happiness. It cannot be commanded, for the more we plan for it, long for it and dream about it, the further it seems to recede from us. In fact, it seems to come to us when we are not seeking it, and have not made any elaborate preparations for it.

Forty-three-year-old unemployed spinster 'interested in writing'.<sup>132</sup>

In their founding pamphlet of early 1937, Madge and Harrison outlined their fledgling organization's approach: 'Mass-Observation intends to work with a new method. It intends to make use not only of the trained observer, but of the untrained observer, the man in the street. Ideally, it is the observation by everyone of everyone, including themselves'.<sup>133</sup> Competitions provided one way of generating self-observation by Bolton people across the duration of the Worktown project. The material generated by the 1938 happiness competition offers ways into the narration of working-class selfhood; its existence suggests that the Worktown project can be read as more than observation *of* the homogenized masses.

Mass Observation's happiness material is also significant because it sheds light on a period which has not yet been subject to the attentions of scholars from the field of 'happiness economics', who have tended to focus on the period after the Second World War.<sup>134</sup> Richard Layard, for example, has suggested that British happiness levels have not risen since the mid 1970s and may not have been significantly lower in the 1950s than in 2005.<sup>135</sup> And yet we currently know very little about the period prior to the 1950s. The existing studies of happiness assume that a certain level of income is necessary to attain basic happiness, above which there are diminishing happiness returns; these studies focus on the long postwar period of economic prosperity and, in Britain at least, cradle-to-grave welfare provision. The material gathered by Mass Observation in Bolton in 1938 permits analysis of a period of economic uncertainty prior to the introduction of a comprehensive welfare state. Although it is a small-scale survey restricted to one town, it provides socio-economic data that can help explain why individuals report different levels of well-being.<sup>136</sup>

As we have seen, the majority of respondents believed happiness to be something that emerged from within – founded upon an ethical framework of kindness to others and small acts of everyday decency.<sup>137</sup> This framework had roots in religiosity, but was not defined by Christian belief alone. Happiness constituted personal contentment facilitated through everyday social relations. Home and family lay at the heart of understandings of happiness, acting as defensive ramparts against the material uncertainties of life in this period. As one husband and father put it:

[h]appiness I have it, a good wife and pal and a fine son, all combining to please one another and shouldering any burden we do meet with, like I am experiencing now in the Cotton Trade. We surmount these difficulties with a smile to ‘get there’ including our annual holidays. I do not desire anything more just enough.<sup>138</sup>

Nonetheless, our evidence suggests that the meaning of happiness within the home was gendered. While women were a little more likely than men to claim that they were ‘very happy’ or ‘frequently happy’, they often represented their happiness as being contingent upon the happiness of other family members. Their happiness was also more likely to be conditioned by religious faith.

For the people of Bolton, economic security was the most crucial factor making for ‘true happiness’.<sup>139</sup> Relatively high income was not, however, deemed essential. A sizeable minority believed that excessive money and consumer goods could generate unhappiness rather than well-being. Commercial leisure and personal pleasure were not prioritized within constructions of happiness. While Bolton certainly did not lack leisure facilities, its inhabitants did not represent them as crucial determinants of well-being. Few believed that ‘more pleasure’ would generate more happiness; a holiday town was not an easier place to be happy than a workaday town; weekends were not especially happy times of the week. Even among the young – defined as those twenty-five years and under – pleasure was not an important factor making for happiness. What these findings therefore suggest is that we need to further interrogate the significance of leisure in everyday lives and consider contemporaneous assessments of its impact and emotional value.<sup>140</sup>

The visions of happiness offered by the competition respondents tell us much about the world views of ordinary men and women following the 1930s slump. Perhaps surprisingly, at a time when further international conflict looked increasingly

likely, individuals' self-reported well-being was still firmly anchored in the immediacy of their everyday working and domestic lives. Fears of economic insecurity – and the potentially devastating impact that this could have on domestic and social relations – loomed large in Boltonians' self-assessments. Security provided the necessary context for happiness; modes of selfhood which self-consciously foregrounded kindness and mutuality were its driving force. Religious faith often informed the dominant moral approach although secular ethical frameworks were also influential. Nonetheless, the privileging of kindness to others as a mechanism for attaining personal happiness was also grounded in the survival strategies of working-class communities which had evolved in the second half of the nineteenth century and persisted into 1930s Britain.<sup>141</sup>

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## APPENDIX: THE HAPPINESS QUESTIONNAIRE

The number of entries for this competition has been large and of a very high standard. A number of the best have been selected for final consideration before awarding the prizes. This is one of these final choices. In order to assist us in selecting the best from a number of good ones, we (sic) asking you to answer the following simple questions. These aren't intended to be personal or anything: simply to help John

**Comment [A1]:** Bernard: layout?  
Own page?

Hilton the judge. Make the answers as simply and straightforward as possible. The prizes are for sincerity, not for style.

Please return the filled in questionnaire not later than Monday to:-

COMPETITIONS

85 DAVENPORT STREET

BOLTON

So that we can announce the results in Wednesday's Evening News.

There will be a special extra prize of a £1 for the best questionnaire.

Make the answers YOUR answers, Not the ones you might think we like.

1. The sort of job you have
2. Your age (approximately)
3. How often are you really happy?
4. Please number in order of importance, 1-10, which you think most important to true happiness of the following, put 1 for the one you think the most important, 2 for the next, 3 for the third and so on till 10.

More equality	More politics
More beauty	More religion
More leadership and authority	More humour
More pleasure	More knowledge
More security	More action

5. Which is the easier place to be happy in: Blackpool or Bolton
6. Is it easier to be happier weekends or mid-week or is it all the same to you?
7. Has luck anything to do with happiness – if so, what?

OK, FILL IN. SEND IN. THEN WAIT FOR THE NEWS.

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## NOTES AND REFERENCES

Extracts from the Mass Observation Archive are reproduced with the permission of the Trustees of the Mass Observation Archive, University of Sussex.

1 *Bolton Evening News*, 28 April 1938, p. 1.

2 John Hilton was a social scientist, broadcaster and newspaper columnist, born and brought up in Bolton. His radio broadcasts and *News Chronicle* columns established a reputation as an expert to whom the public would write for advice. His pamphlet, *Why I go in for the Pools*, based on letters he was sent following a radio broadcast, was published in 1936. He was director of home publicity at the Ministry of Information during the war. From March 1942 he directed the *News of the World* advice bureau; he died in 1943. He was a strong supporter of Mass Observation and was one of the people pushing for its involvement in the MOI. Further examples of his work include *Rich Man, Poor Man* (1944). For further information see Edna Nixon, *John Hilton: the Story of his Life*, London, 1946 and Matthew Hilton, 'Hilton, John (1880–1943)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, May 2006, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/40915>, accessed 14 May 2011.

3 *Bolton Evening News*, 29 April 1938, p. 1; 2 May 1938, p. 1.

4 Mass-Observation, *The Pub and the People*, 1943, London, 1987, p. 18.

5 Mrs Robert Aston of Clarendon Street took first prize; Mr L. Hart of Deane came second; and Miss M. Davis from Great Lever third. An undisclosed special prize was awarded to W. Grice of Brandwood Street. The winning entry is missing from the archive.

6 *Bolton Evening News*, 14 May 1938, p. 1.

7 The naming of Bolton as Worktown mirrored the use of the pseudonym 'Middletown' by Robert Staunton Lynd and Helen Merrel Lynd for their cultural anthropology of Muncie, Indiana, USA: *Middletown: a Study in Modern American Culture*, New York and London, 1929.

8 Mass Observation Archive (hereafter MOA), Topic Collection (hereafter TC) 7, Happiness, 1/A, miscellaneous papers; 1/B, letters; 1/C, questionnaires.

9 MOA, TC 7, Happiness, 1/C.

10 For a discussion of the material context of the 1930s occasioned by economic

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crisis, mass unemployment and poverty see for example, Margaret Mitchell, 'The Effects of Unemployment on the Social Conditions of Women and Children in the 1930s', *History Workshop* 19, spring 1985, pp. 105–27; Jay Winter, 'Infant Mortality, Maternal Mortality and Public Health in Britain in the 1930s', *Journal of European Economic History* 8, 1979, pp. 439–62; Charles Webster, 'Healthy or Hungry Thirties?', *History Workshop* 13, spring 1982, pp. 110–29; Charles Webster, 'Health, Welfare and Unemployment During Depression', *Past and Present* 109: 1, 1985, pp. 204–30.

11 The refugee children were housed in Watermillock House, which was run by a committee that included Mass Observer Joe Willcock amongst its members. Willcock wrote reports on the house for Mass Observation. Worktown Collection (1937–40), Box 8: Political Activities (Fascism, Left Book Club, Spanish Aid), 8/H 'Basque refugee children'.

12 William R. Garside *British Unemployment 1919–39*, 1990, Table 2 col. 3, p. 5.

13 See for example part 4 of *Rewriting the Self: Histories from the Renaissance to the Present*, ed. Roy Porter, London, 1997; Part I ('Popular Culture, Selfhood and Modernity') of *Meanings of Modernity: Britain from the Late-Victorian Era to World War II*, ed. Martin Daunton and Bernhard Rieger, Oxford, 2001; Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Cambridge, 1991; Nikolas Rose, 'Assembling the Modern Self', in *Rewriting the Self*, ed. Porter, p. 232.

14 Mathew Thomson, 'Psychology and the "Consciousness of Modernity" in Early Twentieth Century Britain', in *Meanings of Modernity*, ed. Daunton and Rieger, p. 107. See also Mathew Thomson, *Psychological Subjects: Identity, Culture and Health in Twentieth-Century Britain*, Oxford, 2006.

15 Matt Houlbrook has examined the complex ways in which Edith Thompson, hanged for the murder of her husband in 1923, engaged with mass culture in the letters she wrote to her lover Freddy Bywaters. 'Reading offered one resource', writes Houlbrook, 'through which to engage in the messy work of negotiating emotional and psychological conflict, composing an acceptable sense of self and forging a better life': Houlbrook, ' "A Pin to See the Peepshow": Culture, Fiction, and Selfhood in Edith Thompson's Letters, 1921–1922', *Past and Present* 207: 1, 2010, pp. 215–49, p. 249.

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16 James Hinton examines the process of constructing a 'modern democratic selfhood' through the writings of nine Mass Observation diarists. He suggests that, '[b]y paying attention to their self-fashioning we may have come closer to glimpsing those deeply personal processes from which history's vast impersonal forces are, in the end, constructed': Hinton, *Nine Wartime Lives*, Oxford, 2010, p. 205.

17 The representativeness of the sample is discussed in more detail below.

18 Broadly we can see these as interior and exterior motivations.

19 *The Times*, 4 Oct. 1921, p. 7.

20 Harold Dearden *The Science of Happiness*, London, 1925, p. 12.

21 Bertrand Russell, *The Conquest of Happiness*, London, 1930, p. 143.

22 *The Times*, 29 Jan. 1930, p. 13.

23 Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*, 1932, London, 2007; advert for Stitch's column in the *Daily Mirror*, 7 April 1934, p. 12. On Ruth Collie see Marjory Louise Lang, *Women who Made the News: Female Journalists in Canada, 1880–1945*, Montreal, 1999, p. 115.

24 *The Times*, 19 Oct. 1936, p. 19.

25 *Daily Mirror*, 20 Nov. 1937, p. 11.

26 *Daily Mirror*, 22 Nov. 1937, p. 12.

27 *Daily Mirror*, 25 Nov. 1937, p. 14.

28 The personal accounts written on the occasion of George VI's coronation were published as *May the Twelfth: a Mass Observation Day Survey*, London, 1937.

29 Mass Observation was not alone in its attention to particular towns and cities in this period. For other social-scientific investigations see: Percy Ford, *Work and Wealth in a Modern Port: an Economic Survey of Southampton*, London, 1934; *The Social Survey of Merseyside*, ed. D. Caradog Jones, Liverpool, 1934; *The New Survey of London Life and Labour*, ed. Hubert Llewellyn Smith, London, 1935; Benjamin Seebohm Rowntree, *Poverty and Progress: a Second Social Survey of York*, London, 1941; Sheffield Social Survey Committee, *A Survey of the Standard of Living in Sheffield*, Sheffield, 1933; Herbert Tout, *The Standard of Living in Bristol*, Bristol, 1938.

30 Tom Harrisson and Charles Madge, *Mass Observation*, London, 1937, p. 43.

31 Tom Harrisson, *Britain Revisited*, London, 1961, p. 26.

32 Harrisson, *Britain Revisited* p. 25.



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33 Mass Observation, *Britain*, London, 1939. In Mass Observation, *First Year's Work, 1937–38* (p. 7), Bolton was still referred to as 'Northtown'.

34 1931 Census of England and Wales, Series of County Parts, Part I, County of Lancashire, Table 3: 'Population, Acreage, Private Families and Dwellings', Great Britain Historical GIS (Geographic Information System) Project, *A Vision of Britain through Time*,  
[http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/census/table\\_page.jsp?tab\\_id=EW1931COU1\\_M3](http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/census/table_page.jsp?tab_id=EW1931COU1_M3), accessed 14 May 2011.

35 1931 Census of England and Wales, Occupation Tables, Table 16, 'Occupations of Males and Females, showing also Total Operatives and the Total out of Work', Great Britain Historical GIS Project, *A Vision of Britain through Time*,  
[http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/census/table\\_page.jsp?tab\\_id=EW1931OCC\\_M16](http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/census/table_page.jsp?tab_id=EW1931OCC_M16), accessed 14 May 2011.

36 Harrison, *Britain Revisited*, p. 33.

37 Harrison, *Britain Revisited*, p. 33.

38 J. B. Priestley, *English Journey*, 1934, London, 1968, p. 262.

39 Priestley, *English Journey*, pp. 398–9.

40 *Newspaper Press Directory and Advertiser's Guide*, 1938.

41 *Newspaper Press Directory and Advertiser's Guide*, 1938. Both buildings were designed by Bolton based architects Bradshaw, Gass and Hope.

42 John K. Walton, *Lancashire: a Social History, 1598–1939*, Manchester, 1987, p. 346.

43 James J. Nott, *Music for the People: Popular Music and Dance in Interwar Britain*, Oxford, 2002, p. 159; Mass Observation, *The Pub and the People* (1943), London, 1987, p. 1.

44 Leslie Halliwell, *Seats in All Parts*, Manchester, 1985, p. 12.

45 MOA, Worktown Collection, 1937–1940, Religion, Boxes 14–25.

46 Mass Observation, *The Pub and the People*, p. xvi.

47 Others who spent time in Bolton included John Sommerfield, Bruce Watkin and Frank Cawson; local lorry-driver and future playwright Bill Naughton; former Pilgrim Trust researcher Gertrude Wagner; Les Taylor and Bill Rigby; medical student Brian Barefoot; the photographer Humphrey Spender; future politician Woodrow Wyatt; the painters Julian Trevelyan, Graham Bell and William Coldstream; poet and critic

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William Empson; Reynold Bray; Derek Kahn; Herbert Howarth; Denis Chapman and Zita Baker (Crossman). For more on participants see Nick Hubble, *Mass-Observation and Everyday Life. Culture, History, Theory*, London, 2006, p. 135–8.

48 James Hinton, 'Mass-Observation (act. 1937–1949)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, online edition, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/theme/92530>, accessed 12 May 2011.

49 Peter Gurney, "'Intersex' and 'Dirty Girls': Mass-Observation and Working-class Sexuality in England in the 1930s", *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 8: 2, 1997, pp. 256–90, p. 261.

50 Gurney, "'Intersex' and 'Dirty Girls'", p. 263.

51 Throughout 1937 some 600 volunteer writers contributed twelfth of the month diaries to MO. Early in 1938 these volunteers were directed to answer questions about particularly special days such as Armistice Day and topics such as the mounting political crisis, dreams, smoking or friendship. These 'directives', which continued to be sent out throughout the war and into the 1950s at regular intervals, often asked panellists to narrate feelings, understandings and meanings as well as attitudes and experience. They provide some of Mass Observation's most widely used life-history material.

52 MOA, Worktown, Box 1, Organisation of the Project, 1/C, 'Draft articles about the Worktown Project', 'Mass Observation in Bolton: A social experiment', ts, 7pp. p. 6.

53 Mass Observation, *The Pub and The People*, p. 42; MOA, TC 86, Gambling, 1938–46.

54 *Mass-Observation at the Movies*, ed. Jeffrey Richards and Dorothy Sheridan, London, 1987, p. 5. Richards and Sheridan note that the cinema competition was modelled on those run by Sidney Bernstein in London.

55 MOA, Worktown Box 4, Sport, 4/E, 'All-in Wrestling'. Entrants to this competition were asked to complete a follow-up questionnaire which included a request to rank order the same ten happiness factors as featured in the Happiness questionnaire. This was apparently in order to check the 'impression of normality' gleaned by an investigator who upon attending a fight 'could not notice anything specially cruel or rough in the faces of the audience'. The results from wrestling fans were no different than those of other Bolton men. Mass Observation, *Britain*, p. 131.

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56 On ‘proverbs and social history’, see the chapter by James Obelkevich in *The Social History of Language*, ed. Peter Burke, Cambridge, 1987.

57 MOA, Happiness letter, MO no. 47.

58 MOA, Happiness letter, MO no. 98.

59 MOA, Happiness letter, MO no. 81.

60 Hadley Cantril, *The Pattern of Human Concerns*, New Jersey, 1965.

61 Hadley Cantril, ‘The Social Psychology of Everyday Life’, *Psychological Bulletin*, May 1934, pp. 297–330, quoted in Madge and Harrisson, *Mass Observation*, pp. 50–2.

62 Cantril, *The Pattern of Human Concerns*, p. 21. Economist Richard Easterlin has pointed to the value of Cantril’s approach for the study of happiness. Richard A. Easterlin, ‘The Economics of Happiness’, *Daedalus* 133: 2, pp. 26–33, at p. 27.

63 The coding procedure we adopted was a simple binary system. We scored each factor making for happiness as 0 or 1 corresponding to whether they were mentioned in the letter or not. Factors that were indicated as not making for happiness were scored as -1.

64 This may seem inconsistent with the way in which respondents’ rank-ordered factors making for happiness in their questionnaires. However, the questionnaire presented respondents with a predetermined list, whereas our analysis here is based on their letters, which were by their very nature more open-ended.

65 MOA, Happiness letter, MO no. 12.

66 MOA, Happiness letter, MO no. 168.

67 MOA, Happiness letter, MO no. 116.

68 MOA, Happiness letter, MO no. 2.

69 MOA, Happiness letter, MO no. 21.

70 MOA, Happiness letter, MO no. 13.

71 MOA, Happiness letter, MO no. 11.

72 MOA, Happiness letter, MO no. 26.

73 Mass Observation conducted interviews on saving in June 1939 and found that seventy-one per cent of interviewees saved regularly. *Worktowners at Blackpool: Mass-Observation and Popular Leisure in the 1930s*, ed. Gary Cross, London, 1990, p. 38.

74 MOA, Happiness letter, MO no. 46.

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75 MOA, Happiness letter, MO no. 5.

76 Present authors, 'Happiness and Economic Well-being in Britain in the 1930s', *mimeo* 2012. Available from the authors by request.

77 This was a reasonably uncontroversial exercise as the majority of respondents used the adjectives 'never', 'rarely', 'often', 'mostly' and 'always' in their descriptions.

78 MOA, Happiness questionnaire, MO no. 69.

79 MOA, Happiness questionnaire, MO no. 45.

80 MOA, Happiness questionnaire, MO no. 53.

81 MOA, Happiness questionnaire, MO no. 39.

82 MOA, Happiness questionnaire, MO no. 207.

83 MOA, Happiness questionnaire, MO no. 93.

84 MOA, Happiness questionnaire, MO no. 174.

85 MOA, Happiness questionnaire, MO no. 171.

86 MOA, Happiness questionnaire, MO no. 173.

87 MOA, Happiness questionnaire, MO no. 25.

88 MOA, Happiness questionnaire, MO no. 59.

89 MOA, Happiness questionnaire, MO no. 180.

90 MOA, Happiness letter, MO no. 205.

91 MOA, Happiness letter, MO no. 137.

92 MOA, Happiness questionnaire, MO no. 71.

93 MOA, Happiness questionnaire, MO no. 90.

94 MOA, Happiness letter, MO no. 180.

95 MOA, Happiness letters, MO nos. 84, 91, 168.

96 MOA, Happiness letter, MO no. 10.

97 MOA, Happiness letter, MO, no. 31.

98 Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800–2000*, London, 2001.

99 MOA, MO Happiness letter, MO no. 84.

100 These conclusions have been reached on the basis of examining the mean rank of each factor across the sample. The differences between younger and older Boltonians should not be made much of. The standard deviation on the highest ranked factors is often over half of the mean value.

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- 101 Mass Observation, *The Pub and the People*, p. 18.
- 102 MOA, Happiness questionnaire, MO no. 76.
- 103 MOA, Happiness questionnaire, MO no. 46.
- 104 MOA, Happiness questionnaire, MO no. 53.
- 105 MOA, Happiness questionnaire, MO no. 165.
- 106 MOA, Happiness questionnaire, MO no. 75. This woman slightly misquotes a line from the John Keble hymn, 'New every morning is the love' (1827). The original line is 'the trivial round, the common task'.
- 107 MOA, Happiness questionnaire, MO no. 174.
- 108 MOA, Happiness questionnaire, MO no. 104.
- 109 MOA, Happiness questionnaire, MO, no. 49.
- 110 Madge and Harrison, *Mass-Observation*, p. 14.
- 111 Mass-Observation, *First Year's Work, 1937–38*, p. 36. On the meanings of luck and superstition within working-class culture see also Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, London (1957), 1992, pp. 29–31.
- 112 MOA, Happiness questionnaire, MO no. 16
- 113 MOA, Happiness questionnaire, MO no. 43.
- 114 MOA, Happiness questionnaire, MO no. 67.
- 115 For a contemporaneous critique see Mark Abrams, *Social Surveys and Social Action*, London, 1951, pp. 105–13.
- 116 The panel was not constructed as a stratified random sample of the population as a whole; rather, participants were self-selected on the basis of Mass Observation appeals in the press. It is known that the majority of early participants were men and women of the lower middle-class, although working-class and middle-class Observers were also included. See Nick Stanley, 'The Extra Dimension: a study and assessment of the methods employed by Mass-Observation in its first period 1937–40', PhD thesis, CNA, 1981. For further discussion of the representativeness issue see David Bloome, Dorothy Sheridan and Brian Street, 'Reading Mass-Observation Writing: Theoretical and Methodological Issues in Researching the Mass-Observation Archive', *Mass-Observation Archive Occasional Paper* No. 1, Sussex, 1993. See also Tony Kushner, *We Europeans: Mass-Observation, 'Race', and British Identity in Twentieth-Century Britain*, London, 2004. Kushner himself, while acknowledging criticism of Mass Observation's method, uses the material 'undefensively', p. 5.

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117 Census figures reported by Great Britain Historical GIS Project, *A Vision of Britain through Time*,  
[http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/data\\_cube\\_page.jsp?data\\_theme=T\\_POP&data\\_cube=N\\_GENDER&u\\_id=10003179&c\\_id=10001043&add=Y](http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/data_cube_page.jsp?data_theme=T_POP&data_cube=N_GENDER&u_id=10003179&c_id=10001043&add=Y), accessed 2 Dec. 2011.

118 Calculated from figures published by Great Britain Historical GIS Project, *A Vision of Britain through Time*, as previous note.

119 See E. Anthony Wrigley, 'The PST system of Classifying Occupations',  
<http://www.geog.cam.ac.uk/research/projects/occupations/britain19c/papers/paper1.pdf>, accessed 2 Dec. 2011.

120 Bolton had a higher than average female labour-force participation rate in the interwar period. Forty-seven per cent of women in Bolton were classified as 'economically active' at the time of the 1931 census, the same proportion as we find among the competition entrants. Nationally, the figure was about thirty per cent.

121 Calculated from figures published by Great Britain Historical GIS Project, *A Vision of Britain through Time*, as n. 117.

122 For example, we have classified all those respondents who describe their occupation in industrial terms as unskilled or partly skilled (depending on industry), on the basis that had they been skilled workers they would more likely have described their occupation precisely. This is an assumption that introduces an unknown extent of bias, but only affects a relatively small proportion of cases.

123 W. Alan Armstrong, 'The Use of Information about Occupation', in *Nineteenth-Century Society: Essays in the use of Quantitative Data for the Study of Social Data*, ed. E. A. Wrigley, Cambridge, 1972. Armstrong includes a detailed appendix that provides a classification of late nineteenth-century occupations, which we have followed. In cases where Armstrong does not provide a social-class classification of an occupation we have assigned them ourselves, following his desiderata.

124 Great Britain Historical GIS Project, *A Vision of Britain through Time*, as n. 117.

125 In contrast to the *Daily Mirror* letters, however, the Mass Observation letters and follow-up questionnaire provide a range of socio-economic indicators beyond the name and address to which winnings should be sent.

126 MOA, Happiness letter, MO no. 105.

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127 MOA, Happiness letter, MO no. 65.

128 MOA, Happiness letter, MO no. 180.

129 Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, Durham, 2010, p. 5.

130 Liz Stanley ascribes four broad characteristics to ‘letters en masse’. They involve ‘exchanges’, they have ‘purposeful intent’, there are ‘referential aspects’ to them and they are situated ‘in the boundaries of the personal and the impersonal’. Margaretta Jolly and Liz Stanley, ‘Letters as / not a genre’, *Life Writing* 2: 2, 2005, pp. 91-118, at pp. 94-5.

131 Margaretta Jolly, *Dear Laughing Motorbyke: Letters from Women Welders of the Second World War*, London, 1997, p. 27

132 MOA, Happiness letter, MO no.131. For this woman ‘more humour’ was the most important factor making for happiness. ‘More religion’ was the second most important factor for her.

133 Harrison and Madge, *Mass-Observation*, p. 10.

134 Following Richard Easterlin’s 1974 essay, ‘Does Economic Growth Improve the Human Lot?’, economists have investigated the relationship between self-reported happiness and economic well-being using data collected since the 1950s. The ‘Easterlin Paradox’, a key finding of his research, is that while at any point in time there is strong evidence within countries that those with higher incomes report higher happiness, there is little evidence of this relationship across countries or over time. If true, this has serious implications for an agenda that equates economic growth to increases in general well-being. See Richard A. Easterlin, ‘Does Economic Growth Improve the Human Lot? Some Empirical Evidence’, in *Nations and Households in Economic Growth: Essays in Honor of Moses Abramovitz*, ed. Paul A. David and Melvin W. Reder, New York, 1974; Michael Hagerty and Ruut Veenhoven, ‘Wealth and Happiness Revisited – Growing National Income *does* go with Greater Happiness’, *Social Indicators Research* 64: 1, 2003, pp. 1-27; Betsey Stevenson and Justin Wolfers, ‘Economic Growth and Subjective Well-Being: Reassessing the Easterlin Paradox’, *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity*, spring 2008; Andrew E. Clark, Paul Frijters and Michael A Shields, ‘Relative Income, Happiness and Utility: an Explanation for the Easterlin Paradox and Other Puzzles’, *Journal of Economic Literature* 46: 1, 2008, pp. 95-144.

135 Richard Layard, *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science*, London, 2005, pp.

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29–30. See also Avner Offer, *The Challenge of Affluence: Self-Control and Well-Being in the United States and Britain Since 1950*, Oxford, 2006.

136 There is little other available data on self-ascribed levels of happiness for this period. The authors of the *New Survey of London Life and Labour*, for example, were explicit that they were interested in studying material well-being rather than happiness. *New Survey of London Life and Labour*, ed. Llewellyn Smith, vol. 3: *Survey of Social Conditions (i) The Eastern Area (Text)*, p. 98. For an illuminating discussion of the survey see Sally Alexander, ‘A New Civilization? London Surveyed 1928–1940s’, *History Workshop Journal* 64, 2007, pp. 297–320.

137 Some contemporaneous commentators suggested that a commitment to ‘decency’ was an English national characteristic. See in particular, George Orwell, ‘The Lion and the Unicorn’, in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, ed. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus, vol. 2: *My Country Right or Left 1940–1943*, London, 1968, pp. 56–109.

138 MOA, Happiness letters, MO no. 121.

139 Elsewhere, we explore in detail the extent to which economic circumstances influence self-reported happiness. Cut or specify where

140 On interwar leisure see Andrew Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty: Working-class Culture in Manchester and Salford. 1880–1939*, Buckingham, 1992; David Fowler, *The First Teenagers: the Lifestyles of Young wage-Earners in Interwar Britain*, London, 1995; Claire Langhamer, *Women’s Leisure in England, 1920–1960*, Manchester, 2000.

141 On survival strategies see, Elizabeth Roberts, ‘Women’s Strategies, 1890–1940’, in Lewis, *Labour and Love, Women’s Experience of Home and Family, 1850–1940*, Oxford, 1986, pp. 223–47.